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## NEEDED CHANGES IN THE COMMITTEE PROCEDURE OF RECONSTRUCTING THE SOCIAL STUDIES

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The curriculum of American schools has been designed largely by what we may term committee procedure. The developments of the past ten years in scientific education arraign and indict severely the further use of this method. There is evidence for believing that national committees of our leading educational associations can render a great service in the improvement of the school curriculum. There is clear evidence, however, that they have not done so. I personally believe that the widespread adoption of reconstructed courses in public schools can be effectively brought about only by representative committees of national prestige. I have worked in the past, am working now, and hope to work actively in the future on such committees.

But, up to the present time such committees have completely failed to bring about sound, scientific, and relatively permanent reconstruction of the school curriculum. The cause of this is found in the methods they have employed. They are exponents of an armchair philosophy and a method of working in which the opinion and a priori judgment of a small minority of specialists in subject-matter predominate.

An important current example of the use of an ineffective type of committee procedure is the work and report of the Joint Committee on History and Education for Citizenship of the American Historical Association and the National Education Association. Its reports are just now appearing in the *Historical Outlook*. The reports, to my judgment, are typical examples of what will accrue from the use of such methods. The methods employed are thoroughly unscientific, and they neglect all but one of what I conceive to be the true functions and duties of such bodies.

*The committee's report is a set of hypothetical programs by individuals.*—This report should not be regarded as the carefully

matured recommendation of a great body of historians and educators. In reality the course recommended for each grade is the program of a single worker. The general scheme of the report is Professor Henry Johnson's. He is not a member of the committee. The materials recommended for each of the first six grades are taken from his program. Those for the ninth grade are the work of Professor Shafer and Miss Morehouse. The course recommended for the tenth grade is that which Dr. Knowlton teaches in his classes. The outlines for the eleventh and twelfth grades are not yet supplied. It is important to note, therefore, that we have in this report merely the experience and theories of single individuals, with reference either to the entire scheme or to the content of some particular grade. Furthermore, the writer knows that no one of these schemes has had carefully controlled, measured trial in many schools. I personally believe that we should regard this material, as it appears, as a set of hypothetical programs for the content of the social studies for our various school grades. Some of these programs deserve careful consideration. The course recommended for the elementary-school grades is a result of many years of careful thought, discussion, and teaching by Professor Johnson. I believe we should weigh his suggestions with others and consider them very carefully. But we should not labor under the misconception that these recommendations in this "committee report" represent the mature deliberation and decision of a large body of historians and educators. They do not.

*This article is an analysis of "committee procedure."*—I wish, therefore, to turn the discussion to a far more significant matter, namely, "What is a sound method by which committees can reconstruct the school curriculum?" I propose, first, to measure the methods and conclusions of this Joint Committee on History and Education for Citizenship against a number of criteria for sound committee procedure; second, to sketch, apropos of several important issues, useful and practicable methods, principles, and illustrative data. The complete filling in of my constructive program will be published shortly.

*How can educational committees contribute to the permanent reconstruction of the curriculum?*—Any committee of national membership

with the prestige of a great educational association behind it can affect school practice generally by giving widespread publicity to its findings. I believe it can not only change but also improve school practice to the extent to which it makes use of methods like the following.

#### A PROGRAM FOR A NATIONAL COMMITTEE IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

A committee should act in three capacities if it wishes to improve school practice generally. First, it should act as a deliberative body of specialists, stating educational aims and criteria; second, it should organize important investigations of social and psychological needs which underlie the curriculum; third, it should act as a national clearing-house and forum for controversial discussion.

##### A. THE COMMITTEE AS A DELIBERATIVE BODY OF SPECIALISTS STATING AIMS AND CRITERIA

The most important task of the committee is to draw up a scientific program for curriculum-making. This will necessitate frequent and prolonged round-table conferences. The program should include, first, a definite statement of aims and outcomes of instruction; second, criteria for the inclusion of material in the courses, for assigning materials to school grades, and for presenting materials within grades. Such statements can be made only by getting the best composite judgment of trained specialists—a judgment which is the result of mature deliberation and round-table discussions. Two types of specialists should contribute to this discussion: (1) those trained in the study of the validity of materials in history, geography, civics, economics, and other social studies; (2) those trained in the science of curriculum-making and educational psychology. It is inconceivable that a curriculum can be made properly by either group working alone.

##### B. THE COMMITTEE AS AN ORGANIZER OF INVESTIGATIONS OF SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

The program of a national committee, in the second place, should be investigational. Once the fundamental principles are established, detailed studies of human needs and results must be made. Five types of work appear to be important.

1. Determine the exact status of the present teaching of history and related subjects in our public schools. This means an accurate compilation and interpretation of current courses of study from an adequate number of communities—certainly several hundred—selected so as to make a perfectly representative sample of the whole country on such matters as: (*a*) aims, objectives, and specified outcomes of instruction; (*b*) scope of the course which is covered in each grade—nation, period, or region studied; (*c*) time devoted to the subjects of each grade; (*d*) the precise materials used by the pupils—textbooks, reference books, map studies, activities employed, miscellaneous materials; (*e*) by the use of trained specialists, adequately financed, analyze by careful quantitative methods and interpret thoroughly the content of school textbooks and other materials and also class activities, actually in operation in public schools. The purpose of this is to determine precisely the content and arrangement of our present curriculum. We must know definitely what present practice is in order constructively to evaluate it and scientifically to reconstruct it.

2. Evaluate critically and constructively the scientific investigations of curriculum-making in the social studies that have already been published. In like fashion, borrow and make similar use of unpublished curriculum studies in our universities and schools of education. The findings of many such investigations are deposited in the libraries of universities like the University of Iowa, University of Chicago, Teachers College, Leland Stanford Junior University, and others.

3. Make and publish an exhaustive evaluation of representative examples of experimental courses. A score or more of important innovations can always be found among the thousands of schools and school systems. Scrutiny and careful weighing of the purposes, programs, and accomplishments of these new types of courses, some of which are truly experimental, are the most important functions of national committees.

4. Test objectively the results obtained from present instruction in a sampling of typical public schools by the employment of standard measures of attainment. This would reveal to what extent pupils have mastered great relationships, principles, and

"laws"; to what extent they have developed an appreciation of and an acquaintance with contemporary problems; and in how far they have stored up for effective use socially valuable information. It is recognized that, at the present time, measures of attainment in the social studies are far from being well standardized. Hence an important function of such a committee is to further the making of adequate tests of attainment with which to measure the outcomes of instruction.

5. Make scientific investigations of social and psychological needs for the purpose of discovering what should be included in the courses and to what grades different materials should be assigned. Such investigations should be delegated to expert collaborators—specialists trained in educational research. Similarly, the committee should endeavor to stimulate constructive research by others for the discovery of what ought to be taught, and in what grades the material should be given. Studies can be made, for example, which will determine definitely what great principles or generalizations in history, economics, politics, industry, geography, etc., the outstanding leaders of today in each field would include in the curriculum for all pupils to master before they leave school. Studies can be made of the actual historical allusions needed by all people who read newspapers and magazines. Studies are needed to show what are the great contemporary problems and issues which all children should have an appreciation of, and with which they should be acquainted.

#### C. THE COMMITTEE AS A CLEARING-HOUSE AND A FORUM

It should stimulate controversial discussion by publishing and debating with school people generally its own programs, various other programs of work, different hypotheses concerning the selection and arrangement of subject-matter, theories of teaching, principles of organization, and the like. It should direct this discussion to the consideration of big issues and important questions so that after some years both clear thinking and experimentation will make possible a widespread agreement on fundamental matters. It should get official sanction for, and give widespread publicity to, the findings obtained from the committee's careful investigations, deliberations, and decisions.

## D. THE CONTINUING COMMITTEE

As a continuing or standing body, once its recommendations are put into practice, it should study their application in public schools; collect reactions of school people to the proposed program; test results obtained by different organizations of material found by the committees to be socially valuable; finally, report these findings periodically to the school public.

I submit the foregoing sketch as a program for a national committee in the social studies. Should not the program of any national committee in any school subject conform to some such scheme? Up to the present time no educational committee appointed to reorganize a school subject has made use of even a major part of such a program. In another subject, mathematics, the progressive work of the National Committee on Mathematical Requirements is notable. This committee, under the leadership of Dr. J. W. Young and Mr. J. A. Foberg, has employed a technique vastly more scientific than that of earlier bodies.

HOW DOES THE PROCEDURE AND THE COURSE RECOMMENDED BY  
THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON HISTORY AND EDUCATION FOR  
CITIZENSHIP MEASURE UP ON THESE CRITERIA?

The committee has failed to fulfil all but one of these functions. Although it has not obtained the official sanction of the American Historical Association, it has given widespread publicity to the findings of the committee. These findings, however, have been based on inadequate evidence, have been derived by unscientific methods, and leave the social-studies situation in practically the same impasse as before the committee was appointed. Let us see precisely what it has and has not done.

## A. LACK OF A PROGRAM FOR CURRICULUM-MAKING

The most serious defect is the complete omission of the committee's program for curriculum-making. The committee has recommended specific materials for each of the school grades; yet no criteria are given by which we can measure the validity of the material which they have selected. They do not state specifically why various courses are presented, why particular materials are to be presented in the different grades, or why they are organized as they are within the different grades.

This is precisely the vulnerable point in the entire procedure which historians have employed in making the course of study since the Committee of Ten in 1892. I have recently made an exhaustive study of the procedure of all the national committees in history and in the other social studies beginning with the Committee of Ten. In no one of these reports is there stated definitely a scheme of criteria against which the validity of subject-matter can be checked. They all make recommendations as to the materials to be taught—nation and period to be studied—but no fundamental discussion of the bases of selection and of the placement of materials is given.

This the curriculum-maker today regards as an essential first step, and he feels that committees should be stopped from recommending materials without a complete statement of criteria and organizing principles and before the materials have had a controlled and measured trial in a considerable number of public schools. The student of the curriculum takes the stand that committees of educational associations are doing more harm than good when they recommend courses of study before those courses of study have been thoroughly experimented upon. Furthermore, this does not mean mere trial with a few classes by the authors of this report, so that it is known that given materials can be taught in particular grades and by the recommended methods. Rather, it means controlled and measured experimentation; objective, measured results obtained from a considerable number of schools.

**B. HAS THE COMMITTEE CONDUCTED INVESTIGATIONS OR RESORTED TO  
OPINION?**

First, it has not determined exactly the status of the teaching of the social studies in the public schools of this country. The secretary of the committee tells me that letters were sent out in miscellaneous fashion asking for facts concerning what was done in certain communities in the teaching of history. However, school people know no more about the total situation in the country at large than they did when the committee was appointed. And the total situation is chaotic—distressingly so. Before sound advances can be made we must evaluate critically and constructively what we are now doing.

The committee has made no investigation of the detailed content of present courses. Neither has it made use of scientific investigations and analyses of courses of study, both published and unpublished. To two members of the committee the suggestion has been made to use these studies and to make others. No such investigations have been used, and new ones have not been set up by the committee. Apparently the members of the committee have depended completely upon empirical methods and upon their individual and collective judgment as to what is taught as well as to what ought to be taught.

Second, it has ignored published and unpublished investigations of social needs. Although current educational philosophy premises that it is only from objective analysis of human activities, of the actual needs of people, that it is possible to determine what ought to be included in our courses, the committee has not applied the teachings of this philosophy.

Third, much experimentation—much trying of new material in the social sciences—is going on in progressive schools. Apparently the committee has made no use of these experiments. Thoroughgoing, systematic programs of reconstruction, too important to be ignored, are under way in a number of schools and institutions (for example, in the University of Chicago High School, the elementary schools of Winnetka, Illinois, the Horace Mann School, and the Lincoln School of Teachers College). One of the most important functions of such a national committee should be to describe carefully and evaluate important innovations. In some of these, scientific investigations are being made, the methods and conclusions of which will be of far-reaching importance.

Fourth, so far as we can determine, there has been no attempt to test the results obtained from present instruction in typical public schools by standard measures of attainment. Furthermore, the report ignores scattered published material which deals with the use of so-called standard tests in history and geography.

Fifth, a still more important function of the committee would be to make an investigation of its own of what human beings need to know and to be able to do. The committee has recommended a scheme of materials from the first grade to the twelfth inclusive. Various types of historical, civic, industrial, social, and political

matters are definitely recommended to be taught to children without, we must conclude, an investigation having been made of human activities. And this is all the more important when we recognize that an examination of current courses shows that they ignore most of the crucial problems of the day. It is from these current courses that the committee, like its predecessors, starts.

This is curriculum-making by accretion, by reference to opinion, and individual experience. If one uses this method, one assumes that what one has is approximately right and adds to or eliminates from this course of study. What one gets is a compromise—necessarily so because it has to be acceptable to the protagonists of things as they now are. That is exactly the difficulty. Our committees have been almost completely made up of protagonists of the current educational order. Representatives of vested intellectual interests are appointed to reorganize the very foundation of those interests. Naturally, the result is not reconstruction but mere rearrangement. By this method we take English history out of one pigeonhole and put it into another. We eliminate ancient history from the ninth grade and then weave it into the seventh and eighth grades. It is the thesis of this article that progress is impossible by these methods. Progress in curriculum-making will come only by making a clean sweep of what we now have in the curriculum, ignoring the material in the present course (including later only those parts that conform to our criteria), and building a whole new program on a scientific basis of principles of selection, grade placement, and arrangement.

C. HAS THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE LED TO A REAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS?

The committee has published its own program and presented it frequently on educational platforms. Almost never has this resulted in any real debate—exchange of views, modification of the recommendations of the committee. Other proposed programs have not been discussed. Thus, the committee has given widespread publicity to its findings. It has not, however, succeeded in obtaining real criticism from school people and in making thorough use of it.

The committee has been discharged and so can perform no function as a continuing or standing body. In its place is a new

standing committee of the American Historical Association. We should plead vigorously with this committee not to make any recommendations concerning needed changes in the social-science curriculum in the near future. In the present state of our ignorance concerning what ought to be taught and where we should teach it, our most important lead is to experiment and debate different programs.

#### ILLUSTRATION OF A SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM FOR CURRICULUM-MAKING

##### A. HOW SHALL THE CONTENT OF THE COURSE BE DETERMINED?

Let me illustrate what I mean by a scientific program for curriculum-making in the social studies. I mean, first, that the committee should draw up a definite statement of criteria against which each unit of subject-matter to be included in the course shall be checked. My own procedure would be to ignore the fact that we have today a curriculum in history, geography, and civics; start afresh and define clearly the scope, functions, and objectives of the course by the criterion of "social worth." This criterion necessitates that, to be included in the course, the material must contribute (1) to a grasp of the great economic, social, and political relationships or "laws"; (2) to an understanding of established modes of living; and (3) to an interest in and an appreciation of the outstanding "problems" and issues of contemporary civilization. If this is done, a considerable body of material will be included that now forms part of our social-studies curriculum; we will include very much that is not now in the course, and we will eliminate fully one-half of the administrative and political content in current courses.

*Investigation and experimentation are needed rather than empirical and theoretical programs.*—To illustrate and substantiate these statements, I shall publish during the next year some half-dozen studies made during the past year and a half. These studies consist of the following types of research:

1. Careful—quantitative as well as qualitative—analyses of nationally used histories, geographies, and civics books.

2. An investigation is being made of the units of material which outstanding thinkers in economics, politics, social reform, and industry would include in the curriculum required of all boys and girls

through the ninth grade. Prolonged personal interviews and detailed reactions of the most prominent men in various branches of work will enable us to construct a curriculum based upon the very best knowledge and judgment that it is possible to secure.

3. Another division of our research group is making an elaborate statistical analysis of the allusions found in representative newspapers and magazines.

4. Likewise, a study is being made of the extent to which our existing curriculum in history, geography, and civics deals with vitally important problems of contemporary life, with crucial economic, social, and political "laws" and relationships, and with established modes of living. Up to the present time no committee has ever stated definitely these great "laws" or these fundamental contemporary problems, or these basic and established modes of living which alone, it appears to us, can act as the guiding criteria which control the selection of subject-matter for the social-science field.

The result has been that existent curriculums largely fail to deal with problems, vital either to contemporary society or to the growth of our national life. This is a conclusion reached from the careful canvass of the four newest and most frequently used grammar-grade United States histories. Each page of these books was scrutinized to determine the extent to which each of the following types of problems was treated. The aim was to find out whether children could be expected to understand and develop an appreciation of problems of present interest. The problems listed are largely economic and industrial, but the same conclusion follows concerning the treatment of social and political matters.

1. Crucial matters of land; the history and critique of land policies; the importance of land questions in helping to explain the development of farm tenancy and the like.

2. Problems of the "market" and its historical development; railroad rates and rebates; public vs. private ownership, operation, and control of railroads, terminal facilities, grain elevators, and the like.

3. The control and operation of "credit" facilities.

4. The history of labor problems; movements for the increase of co-operation between capital and labor; problems of wages, hours, living conditions.

5. The operation and control of "key" industries.

6. The development of centralization and concentration in industry and business.

7. How our distributing agencies grew—railroads, merchant marine, public utilities, agencies for communication, etc.

8. The cost of living—historical and current.

9. How the press developed its influence at various times in our growth.

10. The story of "how America developed agencies" for the formation of public opinion.

11. The history of experiments in government so organized as to give a critique of the relative fitness of various forms of government with which society has experimented to secure adequate expression of either popular opinion or most intelligent opinion.

The investigation supplies data<sup>1</sup> for the conclusion that commonly used textbooks in history provide such a meager treatment of these crucial problems (many of them ignored altogether) that a grasp of these vital economic and industrial matters and of their historical backgrounds is totally impossible.

5. The limited space of this article will permit me merely to mention another source to which our own research group is turning in its endeavor to construct a sound curriculum: the writings (checked by many personal interviews) of the leading "frontier" thinkers of the day. From some seventy outstanding books in politics, industry, economics, anthropology, sociology, and the like—many published since the armistice—statements are being made of the criteria just named. These in turn are enabling us to put together a course of study that we believe will stand the most rigorous tests of social value. It is our thesis that the existing curriculum and, in a large part, the one proposed by the joint committee will not pass such tests of social validity. Certainly the committee should state its program for curriculum-making—that is, the basic principles of selection and organization of material—in order that school people may critically test it.

By this illustration I have tried to show how a scientific program for curriculum-making makes use of the criterion of social worth. The crux of the matter is that we need investigation, not opinion. Only by an objective analysis of human activities can we determine what ought to be included in the curriculum.

<sup>1</sup> These data will be published in an article shortly.

## B. HOW SHALL MATERIAL BE GRADED AND ORGANIZED?

So much for the content of the curriculum. What about the organization, grade placement of materials, and arrangement within the grades? The new Committee of Eight gives no such criteria for these important matters. Yet materials are assigned to grades and illustrations are given of methods of presenting material which appear to me to be at variance with sound psychology.

*A distinct issue: On what principles shall material be graded and arranged?*—It is astonishing to find that those who have made curricula in the social studies have made almost no use of the psychological knowledge which has been accumulated in the past thirty years and which deals with the learning of great principles, the comprehension of relationships and “laws,” and the acquiring of information. Aside from the development of important attitudes, probably the most essential outcome to be looked for from the study of history and related subjects is the clear grasp of great economic, social, and political “laws,” movements, and causal relations. Subordinate to this, and certainly contributing to it, is a thorough grasp of socially worth-while information—the acquiring of knowledge, facts, and ideas. It is one of the chief defects of our historical, geographical, and civic instruction that the course has consisted largely of the encyclopedic presentation of facts, with little or no emphasis upon the application of those facts to the understanding of great fundamental relationships. We have preached the latter, but a thorough analysis of our practice shows that it has completely failed to keep pace with the theory. In history, geography, and civics, schools have traditionally presented social and descriptive material by the methodical, intensive, analytical study of topics, events, regions, continents, and systems.

*We must provide for practice in generalization.*—One of the chief hypotheses underlying my own curriculum research in the social studies is that in order for children to be able to generalize in handling social situations they must have constant practice in generalization. In order for them to understand great movements, they must be faced constantly with such movements and practice continually in interpreting them. In order for them to understand causal connections, they must deal with them each

day of their school career. In our own experimentation, we present big, broad movements, relations, causal connections in constantly recurring but varied situations in the attempt to develop a rich, interpretative background. We believe that information and grasp of principles should be acquired in this way, that is, by gradual accretion, by the accumulative recurrence of primary facts in greatly varied situations. In our work, therefore, we deliberately present great relationships in the class discussion day after day, believing that for them to be permanently mastered, a pupil must see them illustrated in many diversified settings. Thus, frequent repetition of causes, big movements, and relations is imperative to bring about real mastery. Repetition to be effective must involve the making of many interconnections—not mere drill upon isolated topics, events, conditions, personages, etc.

To provide adequately for thinking and practice in thought we believe it is necessary to do two things which our present textbooks and recommendations of committees do not do: first, definitely organize our courses around problems, relations, causes, and effects, in brief, around the great “laws”; second, make these relationships recur in many school grades and so frequently within a school grade that mastery steadily grows, both of “laws” and of the information contributory to them. How far this principle of organization will carry us only the experimentation of the next few years will show. Whether it will be necessary to repeat these “laws” and causal connections in each grade—that is, whether we must adopt some form of “layer” scheme of organization—remains to be seen.

But the important point is this: repetition of “laws” and facts must be provided for, and this is in distinct opposition to the present practice of organizing the history curriculum. In current practice chronological sequence opposes “problem” or unitary organization. Fact-giving predominates over problem-solving as an organizing principle. Arranging history by “periods” and “years” holds forth over scientifically determined repetition of fundamentals. Encyclopedism and paragraph treatment in text-making render impossible the grasp and retention of vital principles of

human relationship which depend for mastery on wealth of detail and human interest and on adequate repetition. Practice in thought is necessary to develop power of thought.

#### NEED FOR A NEW TYPE OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE WITH A SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

*What can a committee confidently recommend, then, with respect to these intricate problems of grade placement and organization of subject-matter?*—My answer is: Nothing, at the present time. The only sound course a committee can take now is to initiate careful experimentation upon several proposed schemes of organization. Indeed, it seems that the most intelligent conclusion that we can draw at the present time is that no one scheme of organization can be proved to be the best. Certainly no one scheme available today has been proved to be so. However, the psychological experimentation of the past thirty years has contributed certain fundamental laws of learning which certainly can be recognized, and to which one should conform. The most promising lead, it appears, would be to draw up hypotheses concerning methods of organizing and presenting material which are based upon known laws of learning and set up detailed and carefully controlled and measured experiments to determine their validity.

In the meantime, let us get under way an important movement for scientifically determining the content and arrangement of the social-studies curriculum. Furthermore, let us begin now to look forward to a time, three to five years hence, when we may have the appointment of a different type of committee, a national committee which will set up a procedure on the order of that discussed at the beginning of this article and which will be adequately financed and permitted to employ two or more high-grade secretaries who are active professional workers in the field. In the meantime, let us refuse a hearing to any group of workers appointed by a national association which brings forward recommendations concerning what materials should be taught or in what grades and by what methods, unless that group presents a complete, scientifically founded program and thoroughgoing evidence to support its recommendations.